Thai & Lao New Year

April 13 - 15, 2013

Lao New Year, called Pbeemai or Songkan, is celebrated every year from April 13 to April 15. Lao New Year is the most widely celebrated festival in Laos. The festival is also celebrated by Laotians in the United States of America, Canada, France, and Australia. Lao New Year takes place in April, the hottest time of the year in Laos, which is also the start of the monsoon season. Lao New Year takes place at roughly the same time as Songkran in Thailand and Chaul Chnam Thmey in Cambodia.

The official festival lasts for three days from April 13 to April 15 (although celebrations can last more than a week in towns like Luang Prabang). The first day is the last day of the old year. Houses and villages are properly cleaned on the first day. Perfume, water and flowers are also prepared for the Lao New Year. The second day of the festival is the “day of no day”, a day that falls in neither the old year or the new year. The last day of the festival marks the start of the new year.

Traditions: Water

Water is used for washing homes, Buddha images, monks, and soaking friends and passers-by. Students first respectfully pour water on their elders, then monks for blessings of long life and peace, and last of all they throw water at each other. The water is perfumed with flowers or natural perfumes. Some people prefer flowers in the water to give a pleasant smell, as well as adding cologne/perfume. Over the years another tradition has developed with Lao New Year: people will smear or throw cream (shaving cream or whipped cream) or white powder on each other during the celebrations.

Sand

Sand is brought to the temple grounds and is made into stupas or mounds, then decorated before being given to the monks as a way of making merit. There are two ways to make the sand stupas. One way is to go to the beach, and the other way is to bring sand to the wat (temple), or pagoda. Sand stupas are decorated with flags, flowers, white lines, and splashed with perfumed water. Sand stupas symbolize the mountain, Phoukao Kailat, where King Kabinlaphom’s head was kept by his seven daughters.

Animals, Flowers

Another way to make merit at this time is to set animals free. The Lao believe that even animals need to be free. The most commonly freed animals are tortoises, fish, crabs, birds, eels, and other small animals. Flowers are gathered to decorate Buddha images. In the afternoons people collect fresh flowers. Senior monks take the younger monks to a garden filled with flowers, where they pick flowers and bring back to the wat to wash. People who didn’t participate in the flower picking bring baskets to wash the flowers so the flowers can shine with the Buddha statues.

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Music & Dance
During Lao New Year, there are many spectacles including traditional Lao music, mawlum, and lumvong (circle dancing). During the daytime almost everybody is at the temple worshipping, hoping to have a healthier and happier life in the new year. During the evening, people of all ages go to the wat for entertainment.

Greetings
There are several ways to wish someone a happy Lao New Year. The most common expressions are soukdee pbeemai, souksanvahn pbeemai or sabaidee pbeemai, which can be translated into English as “Happy New Year”.

Lao/Thai New Year Events in Sacramento

Laotian New Year Party at Wat Lao Saophuph
Buddhist ceremony, live band, food vendors, pageant show and more. April 27th and 28th (Saturday, Sunday) 10AM-8PM.
Address: 8741 Gerber Road, Sacramento, CA 95828

Laotian New Year party hosted by Lao American Advancement Organization (LAAO)
Saturday, May 18, 2013 at Cal Expo, 10AM-10PM
Performance, Buddhist ceremony, live bands, food vendors and more.

Thai New Year celebration at Wat Sacramento Buddhavanaram
April 14th (Sunday) 9:30AM-8PM
Buddhist ceremony, Thai music, beauty pageants, performances, raffles and more.
151 South Avenue, Sacramento, California 95838
• 916.925.1579 • www.watsacramento.org

Wat Phosiesattanak (Wat Rio Linda)
http://www.watriolinda.org/
Sunday, April 14th 2013 @ 10AM-12PM
4845 Rio Linda Blvd, Sacramento, CA 95838
Thak Baht (Alms Offering) | Blessings for New Years | Bless Buddha Statues | Baci (Traditional Blessing) | Lao Food & Drink | Nang Sangkhun Pageantry Parade | Lao Cultural Dance Group Performance

New MIS Supervisor - Mali Thongsonlone

Born in Thailand, Mali moved to Hawaii with her parents when she was one month old. There she completed all of her schooling, and worked on a degree in Business Management at the University of Hawaii in Honolulu. In 2001 Mali accepted a job offer with Verizon & moved to Sacramento, California. She worked in resource management & was a customer service supervisor.

Mali speaks, reads & writes in Lao and Thai. She has utilized her language skills as an interpreter since she was 17 years old, at various organizations, including US immigration, CTS Language Links, and Interlingua. She was actively looking for a job with UCDHS when Medical Interpreting Services had an Analyst III/Supervisor vacancy.

Outside of work, Mali likes to cook Thai, Lao, Italian, Chinese, Hawaiian, Filipino, and Korean foods. She loves singing too. She is expecting her first child this September. “I am happy to be a part of the UCDHS medical interpreting team,” - says Mali, “Getting a job here is like winning a lottery ticket!” On her very first day of work, Mali was already interpreting via video for the first time in her life.

Welcome aboard to our busy department, Mali! You are a great addition to our team.